News



President Joe Biden speaks at the National Prayer Breakfast on Capitol Hill, Thursday, Feb. 2, 2023, in Washington. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

Colleen Long

View Author Profile

Chris Megerian

View Author Profile

The Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Washington — February 2, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

President Joe Biden delivered a message of unity at the National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 2, the first time the annual event has been held since its leadership and structure were overhauled to distance it from a controversial private religious group.

"In our politics and in our lives, we too often see each other as opponents and not competitors. We see each other as enemies, not neighbors," Biden said. "And as tough as these times have been, if we look closer, we see the strength, the determination that has long defined America."

The breakfast was held at the Capitol's visitor center, and the auditorium's 450 seats were packed with members of Congress, government officials and others.

Every president since Dwight D. Eisenhower has spoken at the breakfast, which in past years has been attended by thousands. For decades, the event was overseen by the International Foundation, a Christian organization that has drawn increasing scrutiny over the years.

Now the event is run by the National Prayer Breakfast Foundation, a new group led by former members of Congress. The International Foundation held its own event at a nearby hotel, where Biden's speech was being watched remotely.

"Welcome to all 1,300," Biden said, a reference to the size of the crowd at the other breakfast. It was his only acknowledgement during the public program to changes behind the scenes.

Advertisement

The event is designed to bring people together across partisan lines, and Biden sat next to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. The two are beginning a showdown over whether to raise the country's debt limit to avoid default.

"We had a good meeting yesterday," Biden said of McCarthy, saying they would work to "treat each other with respect."

Also present was Kari Lake, the Republican candidate for Arizona governor who lost her race in November but has refused to acknowledge her defeat. Biden has denounced election denial as a threat to American democracy.

Quoting Scripture, Biden said it was important to "love thy neighbor as thyself."

"That's the hardest one, I think," he said. "At least it's hardest here. It didn't used to be as hard. I've been here a long time. But it seems to be getting harder."